

**103RD GENERAL ASSEMBLY OPENING REMARKS
HOUSE SPEAKER JAMES O. "JIMMY" NAIFEH
JANUARY 14, 2003**

*Speaker Pro Tempore DeBerry...
Majority Leader McMillan...
Minority Leader Hargett...
My Colleagues in the House and to our Families and Guests...*

I want to begin by thanking you for electing me as Speaker.

I am humbled to share with Ned McWherter, my friend and mentor, the distinction of serving this House as Speaker for 7 terms. As you recall he was our longest serving House Speaker in Tennessee History. It is both an honor and a privilege to serve you and the people of Tennessee in this capacity.

I appreciate your friendship, I appreciate your support, and I appreciate the confidence you have placed in me. I value your opinions and I believe in your abilities.

Becoming Speaker of the House of Representatives was a goal of mine for a long time—I made no bones about it. And I believe that when you set goals you should go about working to make those goals a reality.

I served for eight years as Floor leader. I served 6 years as majority leader...and finally in 1991—I had the honor and privilege of being elected Speaker.

But being speaker is not only a tremendous honor and privilege...it carries with it an awesome responsibility.

I recognize the responsibility placed in me and commit to you that I will carry out those responsibilities to the best of my ability. I recognize the responsibility to work with all members both Democrats and Republicans for the good of the state.

I recognize the responsibility to look toward the next generation, not the next election. Many of you have heard me say this before.

Today I want to reaffirm to each member the commitment I have made from this podium on many occasions.

First, I will conduct the business of this House as fairly, and as honestly and efficiently as I am able...

Second, my door and my mind will always be open...

Finally, whether you are a committee chair or a freshman legislator, I will always try to treat you with the respect and dignity that your constituents expect you to have and that you deserve to have.

For 21 men and women of this body, today marks the beginning of a tremendous chapter in your life. Each of you represents about 57,000 people—your constituents. Each of you may have run for public office for a variety of reasons.

A few moments ago you took a solemn oath of office. You will find that governing is very different than running for office.

Be careful how you reach your decisions on issues. Take the time to make sure you understand the matters being discussed. Separate fact from fiction and good policy from demagoguery.

I trust that each of you genuinely cares about the people of Tennessee. I trust that each of you will search your hearts and try to improve the quality of life for the people of Tennessee.

Look to your constituents for guidance and for their vision of what they want their future and their children's future to look like. They will certainly look to you for guidance and for your vision on what their future and their children's future should look like. They will look to you to make sound decisions.

Sometimes the easy decision in the short run is not a sound decision for the long run. Your decisions may not always be popular, but in the long run you probably don't want to end your public service wishing you could go back and do what was right instead of what was expedient.

I would like to take a moment and welcome our guests outside this chamber who are watching these proceedings.

As you know, when our state capitol was built in the 1850's, no one then could have foreseen the growth in technology and the advancements in communication that we have today. Our space inside these walls is limited;

We have had situations in the past where the galleries have been full and individuals have not been able to view the events on the floor of this body. The galleries are not accessible by disabled individuals.

And, of course, we have individuals that want to know about the issues being debated on the House floor but simply cannot because of their inability to get to Nashville.

Technology now gives us the ability to show what happens in this Chamber outside of this room. As some of you may remember, in 1999 we broadcast our opening days of session to monitors set up outside in our foyers. During all of 2001 and 2002 we broadcast to those same monitors.

By the end of 2002 we were able to broadcast our sessions over the Internet to a handful of people across the state including some editorial boards.

My goal has been that by the year 2004, virtually every home and school and library in this State would have the ability to access and view the proceedings in this Chamber.

As I said earlier, I believe you have to set goals and then work to meet them. We have met the goal of providing live Internet access of our floor proceedings a year early.

Today's proceedings are being viewed live by:

Erin Scherffius' 7th grade Social Studies class at Crestview Middle School in Covington...

Sara McCauley's History class at Central High School in Memphis...

Bruce Jackson's Government class at Stratford High in East Nashville...

...and I believe Dalewood Middle, in Nashville is also with us today.

I want to welcome each of the students in these classes and schools to our floor session.

Under our current situation up to 300 Internet users can access our proceedings live.

It is also my goal and I believe your goal not to have more long drawn out sessions. I don't want to be here this year on my birthday.

This year we need to do our business, balance the budget with no new taxes, and go home.

And the budget along with the issues that surround it will be our major challenge.

As you know from news reports over the weekend our overall tax collections are now running just ahead of projections; Sales tax collections are a little under projections; and other taxes such as Franchise and Excise are running ahead of projections.

While this is good news we must be very cautious and watch our tax collections very closely...based on prior months our collections were running short of projections. It will be some time before we know if these latest collections are going to set a steady trend or if they too will begin to erode.

This year we will be working with the current tax structure that is in place. As I said in the summer and fall of last year, I do not think new taxes will be part of our discussion this year as it has been for the last three years. Last year we eventually passed additional taxes.

And it is interesting to note that about 95 members of the 102nd General Assembly voted for one tax package or the other...

45 members voted for Tax Reform—which I favored...

47 members voted for what was characterized as the CATS tax package...

And in the end 50 members—including myself—voted for the final tax package of the year to keep the state from absolute ruin.

Last year all members of the House realized that despite any previous anti-tax campaign rhetoric the state needed additional revenue. The tax structure that was adopted is the one that we will be working with for the coming years.

So as we proceed to adopt a budget with no new taxes, we have to deal with a number of unknowns including the ability of the new tax structure to meet projections. One of the biggest unknowns at this time is what impact TennCare will have on the budget and on the health of many Tennesseans.

TennCare is not only a budget issue it is a health issue. It is an important program. A number of Tennesseans—men women and children—rely on it literally for their lives. It is a major portion of our budget. The courts are currently reviewing portions of this program.

It is my understanding that the New Administration will be making recommendations to us on how the program should be structured.

I believe that this body should get an update on the current state of the TennCare program as soon as possible. For that reason, I have asked Mr. Manny Martins from the TennCare Bureau to attend tomorrow's floor session and provide us with a Presentation on where we are with the TennCare program.

It is important for us to know where we are with TennCare so as the new Administration makes its recommendations we will understand those recommendations better and how it will affect not only the budget but also the healthcare it provides to our citizens.

A second unknown in our challenges dealing with the budget, is what impact the Small Schools lawsuit will have. This lawsuit dealing with equity in teacher pay has wound its way through the court system for years. In the fall the Tennessee Supreme Court issued a final ruling in that case setting out the parameters that the State must follow in teacher pay.

It is important that we understand that court decision and understand our responsibilities in following the Court's ruling. I have asked Attorney General Paul Summers to attend Friday's floor session and provide us with a Presentation on the Supreme Court's ruling in the Small School's lawsuit.

Again, as we go forward in dealing with next year's budget it is important for us to know where we are with this Lawsuit so we may better understand the New Administration's recommendations.

Another issue that is before us is what framework should be put in place to implement the lottery. For several weeks three ad hoc committees have been meeting and traveling to study lottery structures. I believe the committees are scheduled to meet again tomorrow.

I intend to have a floor session presentation from committee members on Thursday to help bring members up to date on what challenges are before us in implementing the lottery.

As always, other issues will come before us that we must be prepared to deal with.

We must work with one another and with the new administration as we continue to look for ways to make our state government more accountable and more efficient. Our fiscal review committee has been looking at ways to make the contract process the state uses more accountable.

We must make sure that contracts are properly entered into. We must make sure that the goods or services that we contract for are being provided. We must make sure the state is getting what we paid for.

I look forward to hearing from Governor-elect Bredesen as he outlines the priorities of his new administration. I pledge to work with him and with his cabinet in the coming years for the good of the citizens of our state.

It appears that management and healthcare are his strengths and those characteristics will be much needed as we face the challenges before us.

Finally today, I would like to go back in time almost twelve years to January 16, 1991.

As you may remember on that date Desert Shield turned into Desert Storm.

The Gulf War began.

Time is kind to us and we mostly remember that war as a short decisive one...but as you dig into your memory you will also recall that Americans in our Armed Services gave their lives in that war...Tennesseans gave their lives in that war:

Army Corporal Douglas L. Fielder of Nashville...

Army 1st Lieutenant Daniel E. Graybeal of Johnson City...

Army Specialist John B. Stephens of Morristown...

Army Specialist James D. Tatum of Athens...

Army Pvt. Roger E. Valentine of Memphis...

Army Major Joe Henry Hancock Jr. of Nashville...

Air Force Master Sgt. James Blaine Hay II of Jonesboro...

Army Sgt. Norman Ray Rainwater of Erin...

...and Navy Lt. Comdr. James Arthur Smith, Jr. of Somerville...

Each of these young Tennesseans died in their service to our country.

War is not glamorous...war is not make-believe.

The nature of war is that people die.

Today in the Middle East, thousands of American Servicemen and Women, including many Tennesseans, stand ready to serve their country.

War is serious business.

We can debate the pros and cons of going to war all we want—and its healthy to enter into that debate.

But as a former infantry lieutenant in the army who happens to be a rural west Tennessee Democrat and from a different political party than the current administration in Washington—I believe that once we go to war, if we go to war, all Americans and all Tennesseans must stand united behind our president and our Armed Forces.

At this time a number of National Guard Troops from Tennessee have been mobilized to active duty:

The 3rd Battalion-115th Field Artillery out of Covington and Memphis...

The 777th Maintenance Company out of Nashville-Lewisburg...

The 269th Military Police Company out of Murfreesboro...

The 267th Military Police Company out of Dickson and Lebanon...

Company C, 46th Engineer Battalion, out of Paris Tennessee...

The 118th Airlift Wing out of Nashville...

The 134th Airlift Wing out of Knoxville...

The 164th Airlift Wing out of Memphis...

...and the 241st EIS out of Chattanooga...

Over 1200 of our fellow Tennesseans have answered the call of duty. More of our Guard Troops along with reservists will be called to join our active duty troops in the field.

Our troops will do their duty. As public servants we must do our duty for the good of our state. We must meet the challenges before us head on.

Our troops—half a world away—will not fail us—here at home we must not fail them.

Look around in your local communities...

Find out who has been called away to serve...

Find out about their families...

Offer them words of encouragement—words of compassion...

Let them know that we care.

I ask that our troops and the families of our troops be in your prayers, as they will be in my prayers.

God Bless them all and may God bless each and every one of you

Thank You